

**Arizona-Sonora Progress Statement
Terrorism and Public Health Emergency
Preparedness Response
March 2003-November 2003**

Initial Planning and Organizational Meetings

Planning for the Terrorism and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Response began in the Arizona-Sonora sub-region on January 31, 2003. At this meeting, held in Nogales, Arizona, public health representatives from both the U.S. and Mexico, and all border sites, including the four Arizona border counties and Sonora border municipios, were convened. At this meeting, the goals, key players, and background of both the project and existing local resources were introduced. Goals included:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses of their emergency preparedness programs with special emphasis placed on identifying the unmet needs of the border (refer to appendix 1).
- Coordinate the border region's terrorism and emergency response preparedness planning into a comprehensive, binational approach.

The following focus areas were introduced and have served to guide all future meetings:

Planning and readiness assessment
Surveillance and epidemiological assessment
Laboratory capabilities
Hazards (Chemical and Biological)
Health Alert Network
Risk communication and health information dissemination
Education and training
Hospital preparedness

The meeting concluded with the group listing recommendations for next steps in the planning process. The sister communities agreed to bring other key stakeholders to the table and prepare a draft binational plan for their respective communities. Additionally, it was recommended that Region 11, a federal designation of the border region, be established for funding purposes.

A follow-up to the January 31 meeting was scheduled and held in Nogales, Arizona on February 28, 2003. This meeting again included people from all border sites and integrated new members into the group. One of the foci of this meeting was to discuss the unique resources and needs of each of the border communities related to terrorism and emergency preparedness. Specifically, the existence of the Binational Contingency Plans and the communities' history of binational collaboration in times of crisis was discussed. The City of Nogales Fire Department shared some experiences they had with binational exercises/simulations. Each sister community presented draft binational plans they had agreed to work on at the initial meeting, and set priorities for the next funding year.

Once this initial organizational phase was completed, meetings were then held bi- (and tri-, in the case of the tribes) nationally at the local level:

Tohono O'odham

April 7, 2003—Information on state resources such as SIREN, MEDSIS, lab improvements, etc. was shared. Plans were made for several trainings and readiness exercises. The group recommended improvement of infrastructure, especially capacity-building at the only area hospital in Sells, Arizona, and that funds be earmarked to the tribes for emergency response preparedness. A representative of the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona gave an overview of the Council and current needs of the tribes in terms of bioterrorism. It was suggested that the Gila River Reservation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be used as a model for other tribes. Cultural and historical issues specifically affecting this population were raised.

May 7, 2003—Barriers, as well as opportunities and possible solutions, to binational planning were explored. Consensus was reached on the importance of participating in the development of a trinational plan to respond to emergency situations impacting both sides of the border. The group agreed on next steps.

June 18, 2003—This meeting brought new stakeholders to the table and updated them on the group's progress heretofore. An introductory presentation on bio-terrorism and its implications was provided by the Pima County Health Department. An outline drafted by the Sonoyta Sonora committee in response to an event was shared with the group. The recommendation was made that planning include other diseases affecting the reservation, specifically hoof and mouth disease, and a corresponding "lifestock" sub-committee was formed along with other sub-committees that more closely resemble those of the other border sites. After the meeting participants were offered a tour of the Sells Service Unit.

December 3, 2003—Tribal representatives from Sells and their Mexican counterparts from Caborca, Puerto Penasco, and Sonoyta met in Puerto Penasco. As many of the faces had changed as a result of elections, the group was provided with background on the planning process. They expressed interest in training opportunities and explored possible topics, including decontamination and Incident Command System. The group began a list of current resources and needs, and will continue working on this at their next meeting scheduled for January 30, 2004.

Ambos Nogales

March 13, 2003—The results of a functional exercise were reported. An additional focus area was added to the list presented at the January 30, 2003 meeting: Mass Distribution of Vaccine and Medications. Two additions were also made to the list of priority recommendations that came out of the breakout session at the February 28, 2003 meeting. Subcommittees were formed based on the priority issues, and tasks were assigned.

May 21, 2003—A "draft plan", integrating sub-committee findings and recommendations was made available for members to review and comment. This draft will be presented to the larger group on June 5, 2003 and serve as the template for the other sister cities. A new subcommittee

was formed to work specifically with communication issues. The group agreed to assure overlap and collaboration between the sub-committees.

July 1, 2003—Two options, a city and county model, for plan templates were discussed. The history of collaborative fire fighting in Nogales and surrounding areas was reviewed. The decision was made that, while both models should ideally be enhanced to include public health issues in the binational context, the group would focus on the development of a plan to cover the entirety of Santa Cruz County. Subcommittee members were asked to review the existing template and have suggestions ready for follow-up subcommittee meetings. The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection requested from the group a list of personnel and equipment that would be subject to crossing the international border to render assistance during an emergency. This list from both sides of the border would remain on file and be updated periodically and facilitate crossing of personnel and equipment during an event.

Northern Sonora/Cochise County

April 1, 2003—The group agreed to add a public health portion to the Binational Contingency Plans for Cochise County, Arizona/Naco, Sonora and Douglas, Arizona/Agua Prieta, Sonora and generated a list of recommendations for preparation activities.

June 19, 2003—Reports included the introduction of legislation at the state level to allow protection on both sides of the border during the potential crossing of emergency vehicles and equipment into Sonora. The Cochise County Board of Supervisors will be submitting to state legislature for consideration. Suggestion was made that SIREN expand to other members such as US Customs and border patrol.

October 18, 2003—International Bio-Terrorism Tabletop Exercise held in Sierra Vista.

November 18, 2003—The group discussed the organization of sub-committees and updated changes in the member lists. A sample draft plan was distributed to the group. They are currently in the process of reviewing it and will be submitting suggested changes by December 5, 2003.

Yuma/San Luis Rio Colorado

April 16, 2003—Issues discussed included training, surveillance, equipment, and communication. Participants expressed a need for more training. They were made aware of existing resources and worked together to plan a BT/EPI 101 training that was scheduled for May in Yuma. A 24 hour/7 day reporting system was identified as an important need for binational coordination. Current and future surveillance resources (SIREN and MEDSIS) were discussed. Potential resources for additional surveillance or expansion of current systems, barriers to optimal use, and troubleshooting techniques were explored. Another recommendation was the creation of a border terrorism directory with emergency contact information, as well as other ways to facilitate communication between sister communities, possibly with the duplication of the Nogales Binational Office at this border site.

June 3, 2003—Bioterrorism and Epidemiology 101 binational training was held in Yuma. A general overview of biological terrorism including, historical significance, biological agents, categories, agent profiles, and preparedness activities taking place in Arizona, was provided by Arizona Department of Health Services trainers. In addition, a very basic epidemiology course was offered. It is modeled after CDC's self-study principles of epidemiology and discusses such topics as the epidemiology triad, chain of infection, spectrum of disease, disease transmission, frequency measures and case investigation.

November 3, 2003—The planning group was expanded to include representatives from Yuma County Emergency Response and City of Yuma Fire Department, as well as one newly named Mexican counterpart from Proteccion Civil. The group offered preliminary comments on a draft binational plan that was prepared in advance, combining the Yuma County Public Health Emergency Response Plan with elements of the draft binational plan from Ambos Nogales.

June 5, 2003 All Sites Follow-up Meeting

Representatives from all four border sites again came together in Tucson to discuss their progress on June 5, 2003. The meeting opened with a report from Directors of the state health agencies of Arizona and Sonora and a presentation on the bio-terrorism preparedness activities being conducted at the state and national levels. The functions of the Arizona Office of Homeland Security were introduced, and ways of working with this agency were explored. Each of the sister communities presented their groups' progress, reflected in the section above. The Tohono O'odham group added some information about activities being conducted in Puerto Penasco to improve O'odham access to healthcare. Sister community presentations emphasized the importance of relationship- and communication-building, as well as organizational progress in the formation of sub-committees. Draft binational plans were presented. The group was made aware that an electronic version of the Ambos Nogales 'Mutual Assistance' Terrorism and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Plan and a draft of the Binational Emergency Operations Directory would be made available as resources for all sites through the Office of Border Health. Finally, the group was updated on horizontal meetings that had taken place and Arizona-Sonora was commended for its exceptional progress along the border.

November 7 through November 18

The Arizona Statewide/Bi-National Full-Scale Exercise was conducted. This exercise tested emergency and public health response to an explosion and chemical (chlorine) release along the Arizona-Sonora border, with the incident taking place at the Mariposa Port of Entry in Nogales. It also included Mental Health and Recovery and Mitigation tabletop exercises as follow-up to the event. Evaluation data will be available shortly (see <http://www.azstarnet.com/star/Mon/31117Nogalesdrill.html> for more information)

November 25, 2003 All Sites Retreat

A retreat bringing together all sites took place November 25. Information on the progress and accomplishments of local sites was shared, including the existing draft plans. Copies of a comprehensive border-wide binational emergency response directory were distributed. Access to and development of the SIREN Border Health Portal and use of supplemental funding were discussed. The group reviewed and approved the Scope of Work for the use of supplemental funds.

Conclusion

To date, all border sites have achieved the following:

- Formed and expanded binational group of local stakeholders
- Identified local needs and elaborated a list of recommendations and next steps
- Identified, documented, and shared information on local resources available on both sides of the border
- Identified potentially useful, local models for binational collaboration in emergency response
- Organized into subcommittees and/or defined roles and responsibilities within their groups
- Discussed expansion of training opportunities and surveillance systems
- Produced a first draft of their Binational Terrorism and Emergency Preparedness Plans (three of four have produced a final draft)
- Produced and distributed a Binational Emergency Operations Directory
- Purchased lab equipment

Final drafts of binational public health emergency response plans should be received from all sites by the end of 2003. In addition to finalizing the binational plans, groups plan to continue to work on preparedness activities based on the recommendations generated, including continued training, enhancement of surveillance and communication systems, including enhancement of the Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance Program, purchase of equipment and vaccines, identification and coordination of current resources, and to continue to update and improve their plans as circumstances and capacities change.